

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת עקב

**והיה עקב תשמעון את המשפטים האלה ושמרתם ועשיתם אתם ושמר
ה' אלקיך לך את הברית ואת החסד אשר נשבע לאבותיך**
“And it shall be, because you listen to these ordinances and keep and do
them, that Hashem, your G-d, shall keep with you the covenant and the
mercy that he swore to your fathers” (7:12)

The Baal HaTurim points out that the word "eikev" contains the same letters as "keva," "permanent." The blessings will only come to us if our service of Hashem is permanent and constant. A person is supposed to set times for Torah learning that he keeps every day. If we only keep the Torah when it is convenient or every so often, we will not merit the blessings. There is no such thing as a vacation from serving Hashem. We must serve Hashem constantly, at all times and through whatever it is that we may be doing. Wherever we go, whether in the shul or beis hamedrash, whether at home or at work, the ultimate purpose of all of our actions should be to serve Hashem. This is the key to deserving the bountiful blessings described at the beginning of the parsha.

Eikev literally means the heel or the end. The Baal HaTurim notes that the final words of the previous parsha state that the mitzvos were "commanded today to do them" and this parsha continues, "at then end, if you listen..." and then enumerates the reward. Our task in life is to fulfill the mitzvos today, while we are still alive and able to do them. The reward will come in the end, in the World to Come. We should always remember that there is another world waiting for us where one receives repayment in full for all of his mitzvos.

Why does the Torah choose to use the word “eikev,” literally “heel,” in this posuk? Rashi answers that there are some mitzvos that people “step on” and are avoided more than other mitzvos. The posuk is telling us that if one is careful to fulfill the mitzvos that people trample with their “heel,” he will receive a great reward. R’ Dovid Feinstein adds that this does not mean that the reward is solely based on the performance of mitzvos that people step on. Rather, if a person is sensitive to mitzvos that people trample, it shows an awareness of one’s responsibility. If one is sensitive to the lighter mitzvos, he will certainly be aware of the weightier mitzvos and do them properly. This is similar to the idea that the best way to judge a person’s character is through

how he approaches the little things in life, such as minor polite gestures. This is why the posuk uses this language of “eikev.” We must learn from this to be careful about even the small mitzvos, such as holding the door for people and greeting them with a smile. These small things show that we are constantly aware of what we need to do and will help us to do all of the mitzvos.

וידעת עם לבבך כי כאשר ייסר איש את בנו ה' אלקיך מיסרך
“You should know in your heart that just as a father will chastise his son, so Hashem, your G-d, chastises you” (8:5)

The Or HaChaim explains this posuk as follows: If a person sees his own son doing something wrong, it pains him and he feels the need to rebuke his son and correct him. If one sees someone else's child doing the same thing, he will not feel the same way about it. He will not rebuke the child because he does not feel so connected to him. This is the same relationship that Hashem has toward other nations. We, the Bnei Yisrael, are the children of Hashem. When we err, Hashem is upset and makes sure to punish us in order to correct our mistakes. When the other nations make mistakes, it does not bother Hashem to the point where He feels the need to punish them. This is what the posuk means when it says that Hashem punishes us like a father punishes his child.

ואכלת ושבעת וברכת את ה' אלקיך על הארץ הטובה אשר נתן לך
“And you shall eat and be satisfied and bless Hashem, your G-d, for the good land that He has given you” (8:10)

The Seforno explains that we are commanded to say Birchas Hamazon in order to remember that the food came from Hashem. It is more than just a gesture of thanks for the food, but it is also a reminder to ourselves that we owe all of our sustenance to Hashem who provides for us and all creatures constantly. Without Him we would have nothing.

This understanding of Birchas Hamazon clarifies the connection between it and the next section. Immediately thereafter, the Torah warns us not to forget Hashem amid all the good that he blesses us with. According to this reason for Birchas Hamazon, the Torah is contrasting the commandment to remember Hashem after eating from the blessings that he bestows upon with what happens if a person does not remember Hashem.

הרף ממני ואשמידם ואמחה את שמם מתחת השמים ואעשה אותך לגוי

עצום ורב ממנו

“Release Me, and I shall destroy them and erase their name from under the heavens, and I shall make you a mightier, more numerous nation than they” (9:14)

Why did Hashem declare that he wanted to destroy the Jewish people and completely erase their name? Even if He wanted to kill them all for worshipping the Golden Calf, why go so far as to blot out all memories of them?

This question can be answered through a gemara in the beginning of Sotah. The gemara asks: Why is the tractate regarding the laws of the unfaithful adjacent to the tractate regarding the laws of the nazir, one who refrains from drinking wine? The answer is that one who sees the shame and downfall of the unfaithful wife should refrain from drinking wine so that he will avoid any immoral behavior similar to the behavior of the sotah. The question may be asked: Why is this necessary? After seeing the terrible embarrassment and punishment that she is subjected to, wouldn't an observer be even more on guard against such behavior? A possible explanation is that when one sees a woman who acted inappropriately, such behavior now enters the realm of possibility. Until then, such behavior was unheard of and preposterous. Now he sees that it can be done and ideas begin to creep into his head. It is at that point that he should refrain from drinking wine and become a nazir so that he will be protected against such behavior.

The Golden Calf was a terrible sin. The mere memory of the Jews and their debacle would cause people to think about idolatry. It would cause people to contemplate idolatry, despite the terrible punishment that resulted from the sin. Therefore, Hashem declared that no trace must be left so that people will not have any memory of the people who made the Golden Calf.

ממרים הייתם עם ה' מיום דעתי אתכם

“You have been rebellious against Hashem from the day that I knew you” (9:24)

The word “mamrim” contains a small letter “mem.” The small letter indicates that the “mem” is deemphasized and the word can also be understood as “marim,” “bitter.” The people were bitter and this is why they constantly complained to Moshe. They were rebellious, but the root of the problem was that they felt bitterness with regards to their situation in the wilderness. We must be sure to always keep a positive attitude in life and this will shield us

from becoming upset, depressed and rebellious.

**ואתנפל לפני ה' את ארבעים היום ואת ארבעים הלילה אשר התנפלתי
כי אמר ה' להשמיד אתכם**

“I threw myself down before Hashem for the forty days and the forty nights that I threw myself down, for Hashem had intended to destroy you” (9:25)

Moshe's prayer was able to save an entire nation. This serves as an example how every single individual has tremendous capabilities. No person is insignificant and unimportant. The Rambam writes that every person has the ability to become as great as Moshe Rabbeinu, if he only invests the effort necessary to reach such heights. Every person has a special task in this world that nobody else can do. Each person's service of Hashem is unique and irreplaceable. Even one person can make a difference.

**את ה' אלקיך תירא אתו תעבד ובו תדבק ובשמו תשבוע
“Hashem, your G-d, shall you fear, Him shall you serve, to Him shall you cleave, and in His name shall you swear” (10:20)**

The Rambam cites this posuk as the source for the commandment to daven. It is noteworthy that this posuk refers to davening as "avoda," "work." The words alone are not the main part of davening. What one feels in his heart while saying the words is just as important. This is more than just saying words and requires work to accomplish. Davening is not to be seen as a simple activities where we recite some paragraphs. There is a lot of work that a person has to do to perfect his davening in order to pray properly.

Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur
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